

E CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# NEWS LETTER

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## THE LONG ARM OF NEW ENGLAND DEVOTION

FROM THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CENTENNIAL ADDRESS

*Professor Harland E. Hogue*

Congregationalists are not given to exhibitions of "spiritual pride" but we do believe, however, that it is appropriate to pat ourselves on the back once a century! The foundations of a century ago came out of an explicit Puritan New England heritage. Nothing characterized our Congregational ancestors more than their sober realism. They were political and social radicals who ruled by law. They were idealists, thoroughly cynical about human nature. That such paradoxes of the spiritual life would invite criticism did not disturb the New England Calvinists one bit. Like both Calvin and William James they regarded all of life a spiritual battle. Like St. Paul, the fight was not against petty powers in Rome or the arrogant princes of this world, but against the powers and principalities of the Universe, against Satan himself. All existence was charged with meaning. A sovereign God had declared his will. His earthly child was to accept it and fulfill it. If Cotton Mather or Jonathan Edwards examined society, you could be sure they had first examined themselves. The day's task was charged with high seriousness. Man was his brother's keeper whose need was moral regeneration.

In time the older Calvinism was tempered by the New Theology of Horace Bushnell, Theodore Munger and Nathaniel Taylor. God's transcendence was matched by his immanence. The Incarnation was central as the fullest expression of God at work in human personality. Man's nature, while depraved through self-love, was capable of redemption by God's grace. The Kingdom of God was seen not only as future expectation but as potentially present by the activity of God in the social order. A saved life had to be demonstrated daily by strenuous good works. They did not abdicate a concern for their fellowmen in Vermont, first, or Ohio later, or Kentucky later, in Illinois later still, nor finally in California. They had convictions, not only about their own souls, but about society. "The New England conscience looked out as well as in." The pathos of much of our secular education is that it pretends to understand the fruits of this culture, without understanding its roots. This New England conscience expressed itself deliberately in that organization which proved to be the most significant of all groups preaching the Gospel on the frontier: the American Home Missionary Society. And who made this movement possible? New England, in proportion to its size and population, probably furnished more men, more money and more devotion for home missionary work than any other section of the United States, a tribute that has gone all too long unacknowledged. The early California leaders came from our best eastern colleges: Congregational Harvard, Yale and Dartmouth, and from Presbyterian Princeton; and later from the new Congregational colleges like Oberlin, Beloit, Illinois and Grinnell. Chicago Theological Seminary was founded in 1855, two years before this Confer-

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ence was organized, specifically to train missionaries for the West.

Calvinism in general, and the New Liberal Theology in particular, believed that intelligence and piety were absolutely essential to each other. Again and again these early missionaries revealed in their letters their profound respect for scholarship. Although they had founded a college, yet these early settlers appreciated seminary training for their ministers. Their first leaders were alumni of first-rate theological seminaries in the East. But at the same time these churches desired a leadership that would understand them and the condition under which they lived. To have that kind of leadership required a theological school in the area that would train men specifically for the flexibility demanded on the frontier. The General Association launched the Pacific Theological Seminary in 1866.

The New England theology turned the searchlight of the Gospel upon the whole fabric of society. Horace Bushnell had preached the ordination sermon for the "father of the Social Gospel," Washington Gladden. This act symbolized a magnificent movement to merge evangelism and responsible social action. The preachers in California saw no area of life separated from the impact of Christianity. This was a major motive in launching on August 1, 1851, a weekly religious newspaper, *The Pacific*, the only newspaper of that period to have an unbroken existence to this very day.

Our California missionary work was born in the spirit of ecumenicity. Our Congregational pioneers worked gladly with all denominations. But such cooperation did not preclude the necessity of the work of the Kingdom of God being done "decently and in order." In 1857 the General Association of Congregational Churches was established, the precise event which we commemorate in this Centennial.

Benton, "the father and mother of Congregationalism in California," interpreted the Christian spirit of these men working under such unpromising circumstances:

Congregationalism has here felt no quarrel. It has produced no unpleasant frictions. It has been disturbed by no jealousies. It has witnessed none but the most generous rivalries. Not a harsh measure has been adopted. Not a single unkind word has been spoken. Not an unworthy feeling has been indulged. Nowhere has a root of bitterness been planted. Each has given the other his liberty, and has greatly enjoyed his own. . . .

Once again, we have witnessed the miracle of God's grace in history. A handful of men and women, disciplined by study, chastened by suffering, nourished by an overwhelming responsibility, laid the foundations of Congrega-

tionalism in California. They were concerned for evangelism, for higher education, for a responsible social order; and for the Congregational Churches. Here was a community of folks who really believed in God. Do we? And what will men say of our willingness to be guided by the Holy Spirit, when they meet again in Pioneer Church, Sacramento, in the year 2056?

## A NEW ENGLAND MESSAGE

Horace Bushnell, the great liberal educator of Hartford, went to the Pacific Coast for a year for health reasons and while there preached the installation sermon of the Reverend Mr. Lacy, pastor of the First Church, San Francisco, July 6, 1856, in which he said:

"... Be not too much of a reformer. A reformer of society who makes it his religion, becomes a fanatic almost of necessity. Be an apostle rather. Preach a salvation. Preach Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Go not after the evils and sins of your people; go after their sin, and take the evils only as proof of their sin, the inbred malady that Christ has come to regenerate! Christianity will never be a failure if you preach Christianity. Preach it as you pray it, for preaching is the reflected light of prayer. . . ."

## FOR THE MAN IN THE STREET

Can you imagine church history being published in a paper-back edition? That's exactly what has been done. The book is for the man in the street, so that "he that runs may read." It is sponsored by the Presbyterian Historical Society and published by the Board of Christian Education. The title is "The Story of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A." and it may be had at many book stores and from the Westminster Press, Witherspoon Bldg., Philadelphia. Would that our fellowship had a similar book for our laity!

## THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY

The Annual Meeting will be held at the New Haven Lawn Club, Thursday, March 14th, with a luncheon in honor of Professor Roland H. Bainton whose books on church history are classics, especially his biography of Martin Luther. Dr. Bainton will give the annual address. Following the luncheon the business meeting will be held at 2.00 P.M. at the same place.

Members and friends are cordially invited. The luncheon will be \$2.00. Reservations should be sent with check to Dr. David N. Beach, 311 Temple St., New Haven 11, Conn., by March 11th.

## SOUTHERN CONVENTION'S HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Southern Convention, which includes the churches of our fellowship in Virginia and North Carolina, numbering 203 local churches with a membership of 34,003, has established an Historical Society with Dr. F. C. Lester of Asheboro, N. C., as historian. The Society has established headquarters at Elon College, N. C., with a well-equipped room for the reception of historical materials from these churches and also a special alcove for books, papers and records of the former Christian Churches. Persons who have in their possession any materials relating to the history of the churches of this Conference or of general church history are invited to send it to the Society.

The library of the Society will be a fine addition to that of the College. Mrs. Oma U. Johnson is the Resident Librarian and Secretary of the Historical Society. This development of historical interest in these churches is most welcome to our national fellowship and will be a center of information and interest to members of the former Christian Churches throughout the land. The Christian Churches have a history of fascinating interest, for these churches had an influence far beyond their numbers in pioneering for a free gospel Church. They were the first indigenous Church in America, being formed in the period immediately following the Revolutionary War.

### WHY?

No question of greater import has ever been asked of the first half of American history (1607-1789) than this: Why did 20,000 English men, women and children suddenly abandon their familiar surroundings during the years 1630-1642 and sail three thousand miles across the Atlantic to "the stern and rockbound coast" behind which lay the terrifying if fascinating New England wilderness?

To our secular age the fact that the hand of God regulated every phase of seventeenth century life is very difficult to fathom. The security these people sought could only be achieved in the worship of God by what came to be called "The New England Way," for economics, politics, social, and even cultural matters were then comprehended only in a context of religion and set forth in a language replete with religious metaphors and images.

Carl Bridenbaugh, N. Y. Times

## AN INFORMED CHRISTIAN IS A MORE EFFECTIVE CHURCH MEMBER

If you know how the Christian church began in New Testament times, you stand on solid ground.

If you know what your church teaches about

God and Christ, you possess dependable spiritual standards.

If you know the consecrated men and women who guided your church in bygone generations, you will find wisdom and inspiration for present tasks.

*Selected*

## CENTENNIAL OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE

The leader in this number of the *News Letter* is from the historical address by Harland E. Hogue, Carl S. Patton Professor of the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California, at the Centennial of the Northern California Conference, Pioneer Church, Sacramento, May 18, 1956.

Dr. Hogue is a member of this Society and is greatly interested in the history of the churches in the West. His doctrinal thesis at Union-Columbia was on the topic "A History of Religion in the Pacific Southwest, 1846-1880." With Dr. William D. Pratt of Northern California he is planning a development of the services of the Pacific School of Religion as a depository of Western church records and the further expansion of the School as a center of Congregational Church history.

The complete address, reviewing the founding and development of the churches in that great section, is a major contribution to our history. The address should be read widely. Copies may be secured (at 15¢ per copy) from the Northern California Conference, 608 Flood Bldg., San Francisco 2, Calif.

## CONGREGATIONALISM ON THE PACIFIC COAST

One hundred years is not so long a period when looking back, but a century almost spans the history of Congregationalism on the Pacific Coast. The celebration of the Centennial of the organization of the N. California Conference draws attention to the quite marvelous growth of the churches in that section, not only of our own but all churches, although our churches were among the very first to be organized. The stories of these early churches are thrilling annals — the heroism, devotion and victory in the face of great peril, tribulation and loss. There are, according to the dates given in the Year Book, ten churches in that great section of 100 or more years. They are:

California — Oroville, 1857, Petaluma, 1854, Sacramento, Pioneer, 1849, San Francisco, First, 1849, Santa Cruz, 1857

Oregon — Forest Grove, 1845, Oregon City, 1844, Portland, First, 1851, St. Helens, 1852, Salem, First, 1852

The Congregational churches in the four Pacific Coast Conferences now number 431, with a membership of 132,873, and new churches are being established throughout the region. Thus is history made.

## A BRIEF REPORT FOR 1956

The year 1956 saw the program of the Society develop along lines of practical usefulness. Our list of enrolled **local church historians** increased from 214 to 713 during the year. All will receive henceforth the *News Letter* and other publications of the Society. Our purpose is to help these church officials to be centers of interest in the history of their own churches and to be active in collecting and preserving records and other items of historical interest. We have received 73 local church histories and placed them in fireproof depositories.

There are 238 churches in our fellowship with an **anniversary in 1957**. With each of these we have been in correspondence and for many we have been able to furnish sample programs and copies of local church histories for study by an anniversary committee, and in addition historical information for their use.

Both of these projects have brought us an **interesting correspondence** and many openings for helpful service. We firmly believe that the life and growth of our fellowship center in the local church.

Our Society has maintained a growing correspondence with students, pastors and church officers, Board and Conference officers, and with many secular newspapers, magazines and libraries. All these services assist in building morale and a degree of enthusiasm necessary for any fellowship that has for its object the lifting of the moral and spiritual level of human thought and action. These activities are basic and are elements of true education.

Our **financial situation** is fairly satisfactory. We operate on a very modest budget of \$7,100.00. One-half of the funds necessary is provided by our national and state agencies and the balance is contributed by interested churches and individuals. As these increase the Society will be enabled to undertake new and interesting tasks waiting to be done. The great majority of those who have joined the Society in other years

renewed their membership for '56 and we rejoice in the fact that 26 new churches have joined the Society during the year and 58 new individuals. They are most welcome.

Frederick L. Fagley, Secretary

## OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Secular writers have recognized the significance of the *lives and labors of our Forefathers* far more than our present generation. Our heritage has been accepted by us often without due thought of its unique values or due consideration for its preservation and availability. Strangely, with such a background we are latecomers in the field of historical research and of the educational values contained therein. This Historical Society is filling a *long-time* need in our fellowship. The Presbyterians, for example, have had a well-organized and financed society for more than a hundred years, and the Episcopal, Methodist, Disciples, and Baptists for many years.

Our responsibility is to pass on the inheritance left by men who pioneered in new understandings and true living for themselves and in constant thought of "those who shall come after us." Our problems are akin to theirs, with an even greater urgency, as life has become more complex. We may *clarify our thinking* and *find guidance* to meet our own problems by a study of the writings and labors of the early leaders and those of later date, as Hooker and Wise with their ideals of democracy, and the Fathers of the Revolution, who faithfully fought for the dignity of man and the free life of the spirit; Bushnell who gave us an understanding of true education; Gladden who interpreted the Gospel's social aims and methods; the leaders in foreign missions and home missions and to those who gave themselves to the cause of civil rights, the rights of women, and the pioneers in Christian unity. These men and women put the world in their debt forever. Yet how often are they little known, if not unknown, by our own people.

F. L. F.

## THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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